

COMBATING KIDNAPPINGS:

Another Era of Promises and Little Action?

- Official data indicates that Mozambique has recorded 205 kidnapping cases since 2011. The most prominent promise to tackle the phenomenon came from former President Filipe Nyusi, who pledged to create an anti-kidnapping brigade. He left office without ever establishing it. Now, the new president, Daniel Chapo, has promised to create a Central Unit to Combat Kidnappings — a key part of his 100-day action plan, which comes to an end next week.



Introduction

Fourteen years later, successive Frelimo-led governments have yet to find an effective response to the crime of kidnappings — a phenomenon that began in 2011¹ during the second term of former President Armando Guebuza, became entrenched over the past decade under his successor, Filipe Nyusi, and continues under the current president, Daniel Chapo.

Since then, the country has recorded 205 kidnapping cases². While the criminal syndicate behind these abductions has grown in strength —

bringing the state to its knees — the government's response has largely been limited to promises. The most prominent of these came in 2020, when former President Nyusi pledged to create an anti-kidnapping brigade³.

On January 15, 2025, during his inaugural speech, President Daniel Chapo also promised to establish a Central Unit⁴ to Combat Kidnappings. This brings us to a crucial question: Will this finally be the moment the state stands up to the powerful kidnapping syndicate, or are we entering yet another era of promises and minimal action?

¹ https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/E-fundamental-chegar-se-aos-mandantes-dos-raptos-se-o-Estado-quiser-combater-o-mal.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0itsQeGpZS0mh1meculWwj0Z6i-CRTOoH2_Wl4jsSpTDbaqEFYhouToa6Q

² <https://observador.pt/2025/04/09/mocambique-registou-205-crimes-de-rapto-desde-2011-com-302-detidos/>

³ <https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Onde-esta-a-brigada-anti-raptos-Senhor-Presidente.pdf>

⁴ <https://aimnews.org/2025/01/15/mocambique-governo-de-chapo-projecta-criar-unidade-central-de-combate-aos-raptos-e-crime-organizado/>

205 Kidnapping Cases Since 2011

According to data presented by the Minister of the Interior, Paulo Chachine, on March 9 during a Government Information Session in the National Assembly, Mozambique has recorded 205 kidnapping cases since 2011. These are distributed across Maputo City (133 cases), Maputo Province (49), and Sofala Province (9).

As previously mentioned, this type of crime began in 2011 and reached its peak in 2013 — the final year of former President Armando Guebuza’s second and last term — with 37 recorded cases. Although kidnappings began under Guebuza’s presidency, it was during the Nyusi administration that the phenomenon became entrenched. Abductions took place in broad daylight, in affluent areas, and even near police stations and military bar-

racks⁵. This period marked the near-normalization of kidnappings.

Between January and March 2025 — during the transition from President Nyusi to President Daniel Chapo — 19 kidnappings were recorded.

Since 2011, the victims have shared a common profile: businesspeople and their families, mostly of Asian descent, who are key players in Mozambique’s commercial sector.

Regarding the state’s response, Minister Chachine reported that the Mozambican Police (PRM) have arrested 302 individuals linked to kidnappings, dismantled hideouts, and seized firearms as well as movable and immovable property. Yet, despite all these arrests, the state has failed to apprehend and prosecute the masterminds behind

the crimes — with the exception of Ismael Nangy, who is detained in South Africa and accused of being one of the brains behind the multi-million-dollar kidnapping industry. Most of those arrested have played minor or peripheral roles in the kidnapping network.

Some of these individuals may not even be aware that they are serving organized crime. This should not come as a surprise in a country with a vast population of impoverished and unemployed people who struggle daily just to survive and put food on the table.

Arresting individuals with little relevance in the kidnapping chain does little to solve the problem. The Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CDD) has consistently argued that if the state is serious about combating kidnappings, it must go after the masterminds.

The Promises

Successive Frelimo governments have all pledged to combat the crime of kidnapping, but the most prominent promise came from Filipe Nyusi. With great fanfare, on December 20, 2020, speaking in Parliament, Nyusi vowed to establish an anti-kidnapping brigade. This unit was seen as a beacon of hope to halt the growing threat. The news of its creation was warmly welcomed by the primary victims — businesspeople — who had long lost faith in the Mozambican Police (PRM) and the National Criminal Investigation Service (SERNIC), both of which have been publicly accused, including by the Attorney General’s Office⁶ (PGR), of being active participants in the kidnapping syndicate.

The year Nyusi made this pledge marked the beginning of his second and final term as President. Yet, five years later, he failed to deliver on his promise to establish the anti-kidnapping brigade.

On January 15, 2025, during his inaugural address, newly sworn-in President Daniel Chapo also promised to create a Central Unit to Combat Kidnappings. The establishment of this unit forms part of his 100-day Governance Action Plan, which comes to an end next week.

The Impact of Kidnappings

Beyond generating widespread insecurity, the kidnapping industry is contributing to rising unemployment, as many businesspeople are leaving⁷ the country and withdrawing their investments. Moreover, kidnappings are deterring new investments, making Mozambique an increasingly dangerous place to do business⁸.

With a weakened state — unable to prevent kidnappings or rescue victims — businesspeople are left with no choice but to pay large sums for their own release or that of their family members. Entrepreneurs are growing desperate. They warn that the phenomenon is driving a mass exodus of business owners and a withdrawal of much-needed investment from the country.

Conclusion

More than promises, the country needs concrete actions to stop this evil that is negatively impacting the country’s economic and social fabric. Due to kidnappings, Mozambique is being seen as an unsafe and dangerous country for entrepreneurship. The creation of brigades or anti-kidnapping units is important, but even more important is ensuring that the established bodies have the human and material capacity, and are protected from any form of interference, especially of a political nature. Furthermore, it is essential to carry out work focused on identifying, detaining, and prosecuting the masterminds behind the kidnappings, even if the country has to seek international assistance to do so.

⁵ https://www.google.com/search?q=empresario+rpto+perto+de+quartel+em+maputo&oeq=empresario+rpto+perto+de+quartel+em+maputo+&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvWUyBggAEEUYOdlBC-TE1ODIvYajBqN6gCCLACAFEFONUTPrIH7vxxBTJVEz65R-77&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

⁶ https://cddmoz.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/E-fundamental-chegar-se-aos-mandantes-dos-raptos-se-o-Estado-quiser-combater-o-mal.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0itsQeGpZS0mh1meculWw-j0Z6iCRT0oH2_Wl4jsSpTDbqxEFYhouToa6Q

⁷ <https://aimnews.org/2024/07/25/raptos-levam-mais-de-uma-centena-de-empresarios-a-abandonar-o-pais/>

⁸ <https://cartamz.com/politica/1628/raptos-podem-paralisar-o-comercio-em-mocambique-alerta-cta/>



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